**A TIGER IN THE ZOO (LESLIE NORRIS)**

**Introduction**

The poem written by Leslie Norris explains the agony and helplessness of a caged tiger that lives in a zoo. The poet explains what his life could be if he had been a free animal. The poet has tried to explain about the condition of animals that are caged by human beings for their own fun.

**Summary of the poem**

The poem begins with a description of a tiger that is very beautiful and is walking in his little cage. He has beautiful stripes on his skin and has velvet like soft paws. But the tiger is not happy and is quite angry about being confined in the cage. The poet says that if the tiger was not confined in the zoo cage, he would have been hiding himself behind the long grass near some water body, in order to catch its prey that is the deer. Also, he would have terrorized the residents of the villages around the forest area. But the reality is totally opposite to this. He was confined in a cage which was made up of strong building material and he was helpless there. He could not show his power to the visitors, therefore, never tried to terrorize them. The tiger is described as being powerless and agonized. He says that during night also he is alone, hearing the voice of the patrolling vehicles of police and looking at the stars. The cage life has totally changed the tiger’s personality. The poet is trying to say that the animal which is famous for its fearlessness and freedom is confined and sad due to the human beings who want to derive pleasure by looking at him in the zoo cage.

**Central idea and message**

The poet Leslie Norris tries to depict the mental condition of a caged tiger. He compares the life of a tiger in the zoo with its life in its natural habitat. The poet conveys an important message that wild animals should be in their natural habitat. In the poem he brings a contrast between freedom and captivity. No animal should be caged forcibly. Like humans all animals love freedom. He very impressively shows us how love for freedom is a natural instinct of every living being.

**Explanation**

**1st stanza:**

*He stalks in his vivid stripes  
The few steps of his cage,  
On pads of velvet quiet,  
In his quiet rage.*

In this stanza, the poet describes the appearance of the tiger in the zoo and its daily movements. He says that the stripes on its body are darker in colour than the rest of its coat, and so they stand out distinctly, even when seen from a distance. He moves very softly and steadily, as is the habit of tigers in the wild. The only difference is that this tiger can only walk the length of its cage, and it covers that distance in a few mere steps only. The underside of the tiger’s paws is as smooth as velvet and so they do not create any sound as it is walking. It seems as if all the anger that the tiger feels at being caged is also suppressed in the same way.

**2nd stanza:**

*He should be lurking in shadow,   
Sliding through long grass  
Near the water hole  
Where plump deer pass.*

In this stanza, the poet imagines an alternate life for the tiger that is currently living in a zoo. He imagines what it would be like if the said tiger were to be living in the wild. He says that under normal circumstances, a tiger such as this one should be moving about not in clear day light, but only in the darkness among shadowy places in a forest . The tiger should be hiding itself behind long grass so that its prey will not be able to detect its movement. In this way, the tiger would approach the water hole where all the animals of the forest come to drink on sunny afternoons. There it has the freedom to hunt its prey . In other words, the tiger should be left in the wild to hunt to gather its own food, rather than be fed by zoo authorities.

**3rdstanza:**

*He should be snarling around houses  
At the jungle's edge,  
Baring his white fangs ,his claws,  
Terrorizing the village!*

In this stanza, the poet says that even though he would prefer the tiger to live in the wild, it is not as if it would lose all touch with human civilization. Once in a while, its day to day movements would lead it towards the outer boundary of the forest, where a few human residences can be found. The tiger would growl in its low and intimidating voice as it walked at the periphery of those houses. It would not bother to hide its fangs or its claws, instead revealing them openly with the intention of scaring all the inhabitants of that village.

**4th stanza**

*But he's locked in a concrete cell,*

*His strength behind the bars,*

*Stalking the length of his cage,*

*Ignoring visitors.*

In this stanza, the poet once again gets a reality check. He stops imaging the tiger’s alternate life and returns to its real one. He says that the tiger in locked up, like a prisoner in a jail, within a small cell made up of concrete. All the strength that resides in its body is locked behind bars of metal that make up the gate of its cell. Hundreds, or even thousands, of people come to see the tiger every day at the zoo, but it does not pay any heed to these visitors. Instead the tiger prefers to walk stealthily all over its cage by itself and without any disturbance in the form of human intervention.

***5th stanza***

*He hears the last voice at night,*

*The patrolling cars,*

*And stares with his brilliant eyes*

*At the brilliant stars*

In this stanza, the poet describes how the day ends for the tiger. It stays awake till the very last voice of the zookeeper locking up and going home can be heard. After that too, it does not go to sleep. All night, park rangers keep a watch over the surroundings of the zoo while driving around in their official vehicles. The tiger stays awake and hears the sounds made by the cars of the patrolmen. The stars twinkle brightly in the night sky, and so do the eyes of the tiger. The tiger stares with the hope that one day he would be able to run freely in the forest. The brilliant stars thus provide him with some sort of hope and comfort.

**Poetic Devices**

* Rhyme scheme- abcb
* Personification: The tiger is personified because the poet refers him as ‘he’.
* Metaphor: Tiger’s paws are compared with velvet (pads of velvet)
* Enjambment: Sentence is continuing to next line without any punctuation mark.
* (Sliding through….deer pass) , (He should be snarling around houses At the jungle’s edge,) (And stares with his brilliant eyes At the brilliant stars.)
* Oxymoron: use of adjectives opposite in meaning (quiet rage)
* Onomatopoeia: using words which denote sound (snarling)
* Imagery: poet tries to create an image about the tiger (He stalks in his vivid stripes The few steps of his cage)
* The poet has tries to create an image of tiger’s activities (lurking in shadow).
* Alliteration: plump pass , He hears ,concrete cell ,behind bars , stalks stripes
* Repetition

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Q1:  ‘And stares with his brilliant eyes / at the brilliant stars ‘Why do you think the tiger looks at the stars?**

**A:** The tiger feels very helpless in the cage. However, he looks with hope at the brilliant stars that are free. The tiger is sad and dejected in the concrete cell. He stares at the brilliant stars and remembers the good and pleasant days in the forest and hopes for the day when he would be able to run free in the wild. The brilliant stars thus provide him with hope and some sort of comfort.

**Q2: Love for freedom is the natural instinct of every living being. Comment. [CBSE 2014]  
A:** It is rightly said that love for freedom is the natural instinct of every living being. Everyone loves freedom and does not want to live in confinement. Similarly, the tiger also longed for freedom. He was so fed up being caged that he even ignored the visitors. He took to and fro steps in the cage as if trying to while away the time. The tiger wanted to escape this captivity.  
God has made all living beings equally and thus, the animals too have the right to freedom. They should not be caged. It is their right to enjoy their natural habitat i.e. the forest and run freely in the wild. We should, thus, respect their freedom and should not put them in the zoo.

**Q3: Describe the tiger in the cage?**

**A:** The tiger in the cage is just a diminished form of his original self. He paces up and down in the cage restlessly. He is confined in the narrow cell and keeps looking at the stars as if longing for freedom.

**Q4: Describe the tiger in the wild?**

**A:** The tiger in the wild is a ferocious and majestic creature. He is free and lies under the shade and hunts for his prey. He lurks and waits near the water hole for his prey. Sometimes he growls and terrorizes the villagers as their houses are situated on the outskirts of the jungle.

###### **Q5: Notice the use of a word repeated in lines such as these:**

**(i) On pads of velvet quiet,  
In his quiet rage.  
(ii) And stares with his brilliant eyes  
At the brilliant stars.  
What do you think is the effect of this repetition?**

**A:** This repetition is a poetic device used by the poet in order to increases the intensity of the tiger’s rage and his helpless silence. ‘Velvet quiet’ refers to the quiet velvet pads of the tiger, which cannot run or leap. They can only walk around the limited space in the cage. The use of ‘quiet rage’ symbolizes the anger and ferocity that is building up inside the tiger as it wants to run out into the forest and attack a deer, but the rage is quiet because it cannot come out in the open as it is in the cage.

This double use of ‘quiet’ has brought immense beauty to the poem. Similarly, the use of ‘brilliant’ for the tiger’s eyes as well as the stars also brings out the magnificence of these lines. The tiger has dreams of being free in its ‘brilliant’ eyes. It sees the stars (that have also been described as brilliant) with the same eyes. It stares at the brilliant stars with its brilliant eyes thinking about how beautiful its life could be in the forest. The repetitiveness of these words gives a wonderful effect to the poem.

**Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.  
Question 1.**  
***He stalks in his vivid stripes,  
The few steps of his cage,  
On pads of velvet quiet,  
In his quiet rage.***(a) Why the tiger could walk only a few steps?  
(b) How does the tiger move in the cage?  
(c) What are the two qualities of the animal under reference?  
(d) Why is he in quiet rage?   **[CBSE 2014]**  
**Answer:**  
(a) The tiger could walk only a few steps because he was locked in a very small cage.  
(b) The tiger moves very slowly and quietly in a threatening way.  
(c) The tiger has vivid stripes on his body and soft velvet pads.  
(d) He is in quiet rage as he is locked and his freedom has been curtailed. Thus, he is unable to show his anger and ferocity.

**Question 2.**  
***But he’s locked in a concrete cell,  
His strength behind bars,  
Stalking the length of his cage,  
Ignoring visitors.***(a) What does the phrase ‘his strength behind the bar’ suggests?  
(b) Why does the tiger ignore the visitors?  
(c) What is the tiger doing in the cage?  
(d) What does the expression ‘stalking the length of the cage’ imply?  **[CBSE 2012]**  
**Answer:**  
(a) It means that he is helpless as he is locked in a cage.  
(b) The tiger ignores the visitors because he considers them devoid of feelings as none of them tries to help him out of the prison.  
(c) The tiger is moving slowly and quietly along the length of the cage.  
(d) It implies walking to and fro in helplessness.